United Nations S/PV.8427

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8427th meeting

Monday, 17 December 2018, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Adom	(Côte d'Ivoire)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Edjang Nnaga
	Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Hunter

Agenda

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Letter dated 14 December 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Serbia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/1111)

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18-44297 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Letter dated 14 December 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Serbia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/1111)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Serbia to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and request the Protocol Officer to escort him to his seat at the Council table.

Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Hashim Thaçi to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/1111, which contains a letter dated 14 December 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Serbia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Lacroix: Since the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) briefed the Security Council on 14 November (see S/PV.8399), a number of developments in Kosovo have heightened tensions between Belgrade and Pristina. On 21 November, following Kosovo's failed bid to join INTERPOL, the Government of Kosovo announced an increase in the tariff on goods imported from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina from 10 to 100 per cent. In response, the mayors of the four Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities of northern Kosovo announced their resignations and the decision of the respective municipal assemblies to cease all official communication with the Pristina authorities. The main Kosovo Serb political party — the Serbian List — has organized daily protests, centred in North Mitrovica, that have at times involved up to 5,000 people.

Belgrade, for its part, stated that Pristina had violated the Central European Free Trade Agreement and stressed that it would resume its involvement in the European Union (EU)-facilitated dialogue only once Pristina revokes the import tax. Key international partners, including the European Union, also urged the Government of Kosovo to revoke the tax, while in Pristina Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tanin issued a statement expressing concern about the potential impact of the decision on the population of Kosovo and on the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

Amid the tense atmosphere, the Assembly of Kosovo adopted on 14 December three laws, namely, the law on the Kosovo Security Force; the law on service in the Kosovo Security Force; and the law on the Ministry of Defence. The laws do not change the name of the Kosovo Security Force, which would require a constitutional amendment, yet they provide for substantial changes to be implemented over a period of time to the mandate, role and strength of the Kosovo Security Force. The Kosovo Government, in a statement issued following the adoption of the laws, underscored the right of Kosovo to have "an army; a multi-ethnic and professional force built under the highest NATO standards". In Belgrade, the Serbian authorities condemned the adoption of the laws as an act of "political aggression" against Serbia and a violation of resolution 1244 (1999). They also called on the Kosovo Force (KFOR) not to allow the operation of any Kosovo army on the territory of Kosovo.

Among international partners, the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) declared that the transition of the Kosovo Security Force is, in principle, a matter for Kosovo to decide upon. He nevertheless expressed regret at the decision of the Assembly of Kosovo, which he characterized as ill-timed and in disregard of the concerns previously raised by NATO. He also stressed

the continued commitment of NATO, through KFOR, to a safe and secure environment in Kosovo. The European External Action Service stated that the mandate of the Kosovo Security Force should be changed only through an inclusive and gradual process, in accordance with Kosovo's Constitution, and expressed the expectation of the European Union that Kosovo would continue to uphold its obligations under the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations of April 2013 and its security arrangements.

The Secretary-General has noted with concern the adoption of the laws by the Assembly of Kosovo. He underscored that resolution 1244 (1999) provides the sole legal framework for the international security presence, the Kosovo Force, which is entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring a safe and secure environment in Kosovo and that "any restriction to the discharge by KFOR of its security responsibilities would be inconsistent with that resolution." The Secretary-General has called on all parties concerned to exercise restraint and to refrain from actions that could raise tensions and cause a further setback in the European Union-facilitated dialogue for the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Special Representative Tanin issued a similar statement in Pristina.

The recent developments in Kosovo have further deteriorated relations between Belgrade and Pristina, which have been strained for some time, with no progress on the EU-facilitated dialogue. We are concerned by the risk of tensions on the ground, particularly in northern Kosovo. It is therefore crucial that Belgrade and Pristina avoid any steps that could further worsen the situation, but rather find ways to re-engage in the dialogue aimed at the normalization of their mutual relations.

In adhering to its status neutral approach, UNMIK is committed to working closely with KFOR, in line with resolution 1244 (1999), as well as with other international actors in Kosovo. Under the leadership of Special Representative Zahir Tanin, the Mission will continue to focus its activities, among other priorities, on intercommunity trust-building, which is essential to the long-term normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Lacroix for his briefing.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia.

President Vučić: I am profoundly grateful to the Council for convening this meeting at such short notice. We think that it was very important and very right to do so, owing to the terribly difficult situation on the ground that has led to us face more and more difficulties in the area of Kosovo and Metohija. I have to say that I am very worried, concerned about and even a bit afraid of and for the future not only of my people and our country, Serbia, but of the entire region. I listened very carefully to Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and I would like to say something different than what he said, although I agree with many of the things that he expressed.

First of all, I would like to tell the Council that Serbia has invested huge efforts and great endeavour in maintaining the peace, tranquillity and stability of the entire region of the Western Balkans. We have done everything that we could have done, refraining from responding to different types of provocation from Pristina. We have always been very restrained and we do not accept the kind of phrase that has become customary when two sides are called upon to do something or not to do something. Serbia has done almost everything in its power to implement everything that has been agreed so far.

As the Council members knows, we signed the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations between Belgrade and Pristina in April 2013. Serbia has fulfilled all of its obligations under the Agreement. We made a lot of concessions and it was very difficult for our people to accept them, but we signed it and we have fulfilled it. On the other hand, the only obligation that had to be delivered by Pristina — the only one, and the first 6 of the 15 items in the Brussels Agreement are all related to that one obligation — was the formation of a Serb community. It does not matter whether it is called a community or an association. That was its one and only obligation, and yet today, almost 2,070 days later, Kosovo has failed to put that into action and has no intention to do so in the future.

Serbia, on the other hand, has fulfilled everything, including the police arrangement, the justice and judiciary arrangement, the telecoms arrangement and participation in municipal elections under the Kosovo law — absolutely everything that we signed. But that was not enough. We warned Pristina and the European Union (EU), because we have an ongoing negotiating process under the auspices of the EU, as the Council is

aware. We proposed that we should resolve all of our problems within the framework of our dialogue process. We asked that they not force us into difficult situations that would create a terrible atmosphere between us when Kosovo wishes to join different international organizations, which we consider to be a provocation, because Serbia is the only sovereign and independent State under resolution 1244 (1999), unless something has changed that we have not been informed about.

We begged Kosovo not to apply for full-fledged membership of INTERPOL, UNESCO, the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity and other organizations and international bodies. But Kosovo wanted to do so because it was counting on the support of the United States and several EU countries in the belief that it would win — and it lost. With regard to INTERPOL, in the first round of voting it obtained less than 50 per cent of votes — 76 votes in favour against 78. They then started to blame Serbia, as it were our fault, as if we had to support them, as if that were our obligation. Of course, it was not. Many countries, important countries in various parts of the world, voted against their membership. But all of a sudden, they imposed tariffs, in contravention of the Central European Free Trade Agreement and the Stabilization and Association Agreement, against Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. First, it was 10 per cent. When they saw that their Albanian public audience reacted well to that measure, they increased the tariffs up to 100 per cent.

In effect, they killed any kind of trade between central Serbia and Kosovo. What is more, they jeopardized the entire Serb community in Kosovo, because that is the only way for those people to earn the money to survive, to obtain medications, to go to Serb-run hospitals and health care centres, that has always been the only way for them to live.

Not to mention the fact that they violated and breached all those agreements, a fact to which even the European Union (EU) made reference. They put it all aside. But can you imagine someone in the twenty-first century in effect banning and forbidding the free flow of goods, capital and people just because they did not like a political decision from the other side?

Even that was not enough. Now I must say something regarding resolution 1244 (1999). Not only the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) but the Kosovo Force (KFOR) derive all their competencies and authorities from that document. It was not NATO's decision; it was a decision by the Security Council to provide these competencies to KFOR in Kosovo. What happened? Since 2014 they had been announcing their strong wish to form their own military.

Let me remind the Council that Serbia, in a letter by its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ivan Mrkic, dated March 2014, warned Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of the possibility of creating a very dangerous situation in the region through the creation of the so-called Kosovo armed forces. Here is Mr. Ban Ki-moon's reply:

> "Let me also stress that Security Council 1244 (1999) remains the legal framework for the continuing international security presence in Kosovo and clearly outlines its mandate, which is to provide for a secure environment for all. To this effect, UNMIK will continue to work very closely with the international security force in Kosovo in the fulfilment of these responsibilities."

Let me remind the Council of something else. Paragraph 4 of annex 2 to resolution 1244 (1999) reads as follows:

> "The international security presence, with substantial North Atlantic Treaty Organization participation, must be deployed under unified command and control and authorized to establish a safe environment for all people in Kosovo and to facilitate the safe return to their homes of all displaced persons and refugees."

In addition, paragraph 9(b) of the resolution clearly envisages not only the demilitarization of the Kosovo Liberation Army but of all other armed Kosovo Albanian groups; this is absolutely clear.

Aside from that, there is another question: from which document — and that is my open question to all present — do they derive their so-called sovereign right to form their own military? Where is that written? In which document? It is not even written in that form in their own Constitution, because their own Constitution — which we admit we do not recognize — states in its article 144, paragraph 2:

> "Any amendment shall require for its adoption the approval of two thirds (2/3) of all deputies of the Assembly including two thirds (2/3) of all deputies of the Assembly holding reserved or guaranteed

seats for representatives of communities that are not in the majority in the Republic of Kosovo."

Of course, they could not find seven Serbs to vote for that, and then, who cares? Who cares about the law? Who cares about the facts? They made a decision, and they formed the so-called Kosovo armed forces.

Unexpectedly, even surprisingly, they received tremendous support for that from various Western countries. Here I wish to quote a statement by the EU-8 — the five EU members of the Security Council, that is, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom, as well as Italy, Belgium and Germany — that I received only five minutes before I entered this Chamber: "The initiation of the process of transition of the Kosovo Security Force is Kosovo's sovereign right."

My question to all present is: from which document, from which article, paragraph or rule did they derive that right? Where is it written? I can tell the Council the answer in advance: nowhere. It is just an interpretation — a very bad interpretation — by some countries because it is in their own political interests.

I have just mentioned the safe return of all returnees to their homes. I must inform the Council that Kosovo and Metohija is officially the territory with the lowest rate of returnees in the world. Imagine — only 1.5 per cent of people have gone back to what are the mainly charred remnants of their homes. Only 1.5 per cent. The Council has dealt with many different issues here in this Chamber, but there is no similar issue in the entire world. They created an army and started to threaten to violate and breach even more of the arrangements that we had signed with various organizations, arrangements we had with those organizations, including their presence in the northern part of Kosovo. Regarding arrangements with NATO, the only possibility for them to go with their armed forces to the north is to get consent from NATO, first, and also from the Serb local community. They have already breached that rule several times, even beating the Serbian chief negotiator just because he was sitting at a round table in north Mitrovica discussing an issue related to our dialogue with Pristina.

I will give one important example that best depicts what is happening in Kosovo and Metohija: that of Bogdan Mitrovic, a Serb expelled from Musutiste village. He had wanted to go to what I referred to earlier as the charred remnants of his village, together with his wife and their three daughters and 6-year-old grandson. Instead of being able to visit their devastated house, he was arrested, viciously treated in the presence of his daughters and grandson and then taken into custody, where he remained for months. There were no indictments or further investigations. That is not the only such case. It is just one example of what they do to Serbs who, not daring to go back to the homes they left behind, go only to visit them.

Mr. Lacroix said that people from Pristina were angry with us because of an issue related to Kosovo's bid to join INTERPOL. We begged them not to go there without finalizing their dialogue with Serbia, but they wanted to go there. We were just defending ourselves. We were just defending the sovereign and independent State of Serbia in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations — nothing more than that. Some people claim that Kosovo reacted that way because we started a campaign to revoke its independence. I want to inform the Council that since we started our dialogue in 2012 — which resumed in 2013 — Kosovo has received an additional 19 recognitions from all over the world and we have not said a single word. We have not been angry. We have not caused any problems in the field. We have not attacked anyone. We have not threatened anyone. However, when reversal process started, all of a sudden it was our fault.

I just want to tell the Council that Serbia has always done everything it could to maintain stability, tranquillity and peace in the entire region. We will refrain from taking the wrong steps in the future as well, because we have suffered a lot in the past and we cannot allow any more of our children to be killed in different types of wars, hostilities and clashes. But we beg all members of the Council — and this is my biggest plea tonight — for someone to curb and tame those people because, to put it very lightly, the measures that they have taken recently are not coherent with the twenty-first century.

Ultimately, they do have one sovereign right. They have formed another negotiating team that includes former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army who are under investigation for committing terrible crimes against Serbian civilians. But that does not matter — I will set that aside. There is something more important. They have articulated all of their prerequisites for the future dialogue, which include our recognition of the independence of Kosovo and our understanding that Kosovo gets to determine its own borders. And they are

not even going to change their State's form, which is unitary. As a result, Serbs are not going to get anything.

My question for everyone here is: What should that future dialogue be about? Should it be about coloured marbles that kids play with in the schoolyard, or what? Despite everything that I have said, Serbia is always ready to resume the process of dialogue. We would like to call on the United Nations to play a bigger role in the future. We have nothing against the European Union-sponsored dialogue, but we need the United Nations to become more involved in the entire process. We need to see some steps taken by Pristina. It needs to withdraw those terrible tariffs and take other actions. That will enable us to ensure the safety of our people. In conclusion, let me speak just two sentences in the Serbian language with regard to the people who are living in Kosovo and Metohija.

(*spoke in Serbian: English interpretation provided by the delegation*)

I want to commend my Serbian brothers and sisters for everything they have lived through and the torture they continue to face. I want them to know that Serbia will always stand by them.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank President Vučić for his statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Thaçi.

Mr. Thaçi (*spoke in Albanian: English interpretation provided by the delegation*): I am honoured to speak before the Council today on behalf of the institutions and the people of the Republic of Kosovo.

I want to thank the United Nations and the Security Council for their continued focus on Kosovo and the developments in the region. I will never forget the voices of hope and calls for peace that echoed in this Chamber during the darkest days of the citizens of Kosovo, including myself. My people and I will never forget that when we were facing our toughest moments, the Council became our voice. We will remain forever grateful for that. Thanks to the Council, the world learned of the many ills that were suffered during the war with Serbia, including systematic violence, ethnic cleansing, the deaths of thousands of innocent people, the many thousands who are still missing, and the more than 20,000 women who continue to live with the pain and stigma of the sexual violence that was inflicted on them. The Council was our voice when we did not have one.

However, we are here today two decades after that bloody war and ten years after Kosovo gained its independence. We have been summoned for an extraordinary meeting during a time of complete normality and substantial progress in Kosovo. This is a time to demand a serious review of the degree of engagement of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and when the Council is called on to address the real problems the world is facing today.

Nothing extraordinary happened in Kosovo last week. In fact, what happened was a totally normal decision, both in its mission and in its purpose. If Kosovo has made any mistake, it is that of having waited unnecessarily for five years to establish an army. The decision to establish an army may be belated, but it is in no way wrong. It is belated because we waited for goodwill from those who never showed goodwill towards Kosovo. However, the Republic of Kosovo, which is a sovereign and independent State, has now undertaken the natural step towards establishing its army. I ask the Council what is extraordinary about that? There is nothing at all extraordinary about that. There is nothing that is in contradiction with resolution 1244 (1999), the Ahtisaari plan, the Constitution of Kosovo or even international law.

First and foremost, resolution 1244 (1999), and specifically paragraph 15, refers only to the demilitarization of the Kosovo Liberation Army — a process that was completed in record time and without incident in September 1999. This process was highly appreciated, even by the Security Council and the Secretary-General at the time, Kofi Annan. It was also highly praised by NATO, as substantiated by reports produced by NATO and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo during that time.

Secondly, the comprehensive proposal for the Kosovo status settlement presented by President Ahtisaari — who was the Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo — clearly underscores the right of Kosovo to have an army in article 5.2. Moreover, the strategic review of the security sector, undertaken in close cooperation with NATO, very clearly emphasizes Kosovo's right to transform its Security Force into armed forces.

Finally, and most importantly, the decision of the International Court of Justice — which, might I add, was made upon Serbia's request, specifically by former Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić — underlines the fact that Kosovo did not violate any international laws when it declared its independence. It is therefore Kosovo's indisputable right to have an army. The establishment of the army is the will of the people of Kosovo, with the unanimous political will of the people's chosen representatives — regardless of whether some like it or not. The State of Serbia has expressed its aggravation, but the Serbian citizens of Kosovo have not.

Allow me, in my capacity as the President of the Republic of Kosovo and Commander-in-Chief, to clearly state that Kosovo's armed forces will produce more peace and stability. The transformation of the mission of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) is not a step we have undertaken to send a message to anyone. Kosovo's army is not and will never be a threat to anyone. Kosovo's army is and will remain a professional and multi-ethnic force. Over 10 per cent of the soldiers are from non-majority communities; they include Serbians, Montenegrins, Croats, Turks, Bosniaks, Romas, Egyptians, Ashkali and so on. This is a force that will protect every citizen of Kosovo throughout Kosovo territory— every child and every youngster, regardless of the language that they speak at home.

Until 1999, my people, owing to their tragic past, have always been afraid of military uniforms, precisely because they have historically been foreign and a symbol of repression. However, Kosovo's soldiers will be soldiers of peace and Kosovo's army will be a contributor to stability in the region. In that regard, Kosovo has the highest number of returnees, and that in record time. More than 1 million citizens of Kosovo, expelled violently by the State apparatus of Slobodan Milošević, have returned to the homes and property that were totally destroyed in the summer of 1999. In that context, I am deeply disturbed that some Kosovar Serbs, citizens of Kosovo and members of the KSF, were forced to resign due to immense systemic pressure imposed upon them by elements of the Serbian State.

I was moved by the stories of some soldiers from the Serbian community about the intimidation imposed upon them by the Serbian State. Their families were attacked and their homes hit with grenades, and many of them held for hours on end by Serbian police as they sought to travel to Serbia. This is the terrible truth. I feel awful for them, because I know that the majority of them handed in their uniforms with tears in their eyes and broken hearts. Nevertheless, I want to guarantee to everyone that we will never back down from our even stronger commitment to including all communities in Kosovo's army. This is an army that will serve all of Kosovo's citizens, without exception. The only threats to our region are irrational calls for war and conflict coming from our northern neighbour.

In addition, allow me to assure the Council that Kosovo will respect every existing international agreement, including the letter sent to the Secretary General of NATO regarding cooperation with the Kosovo Force (KFOR). We will continue to cooperate very closely with NATO. All our efforts will be coordinated with NATO. The establishment of Kosovo's army should not be perceived as an attempt to duplicate the NATO Mission in Kosovo. On the contrary, the decision of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo to establish the army is a direct function of capacity-building that will make our country better able to contribute to local security and beyond. Our aim is to shift the paradigm from a country that has been a consumer of security to one that becomes a contributor to peace and stability. However, this will in no way interfere with NATO's current mission in Kosovo. Kosovo's armed forces will, in fact, complement this mission. Even today in Kosovo, 20 years later, KFOR is treated as a saviour mission. The citizens of my country respect NATO members as heroes; they still hand them out flowers and they will be grateful to them forever.

I am proud to be the President of the most pro-NATO and pro-European Union country in the world. Despite the difficulties and injustices to which we are subject, especially in the visa liberalization process, we as a country stand unshaken in our orientation. We do not have and do not seek any another alternative. The future of Kosovo and our region is within the Euro-Atlantic structures. This inevitably leads us to the essence of today's debate. The problem that our northern neighbour has today is not Kosovo's army but rather the existence of Kosovo itself as an independent and sovereign State. These circumstances make the dialogue between our two countries crucial.

Without a dialogue or a final agreement, we will become countries that produce endless and unnecessary drama for domestic electoral consumption, to the detriment of the future of our nations. I implore the Council to take a look at the abhorrent campaign that Serbia led against Kosovo's bid for INTERPOL

membership. I should like to know who stands to benefit from Kosovo's lack of membership in that organization. It is organized crime and terrorism that benefit here.

Should I demean this forum now by using the language and methods employed by Serbia against Kosovo? I shall not. To be frank, I feel bad about their behaviour. It is only natural that such behaviour would lead the Government of Kosovo to take measures with respect to Serbian products that come into Kosovo. However, Kosovo did not provoke the situation. That reaction is the consequence of aggressive action on the part of Serbia, and I want to believe that this state of affairs will be overcome in the near future. Pristina and Brussels are communicating intensively about the issue.

We in Kosovo remain committed to peace and dialogue with Serbia nevertheless. To that end, a few days ago the Parliament of Kosovo approved a resolution on dialogue and the structure of the negotiating team, which includes a governing coalition and representatives of opposition parties and civil society. As long as we do not have a final agreement that can be implemented, situations of this kind will continue to be repeated. Neither I nor the people of Kosovo support the conflict. Never in our history have we instigated any conflicts, in fact. We have always been the victims and we have always fought for survival.

Peace does not mean having no disagreements, but this cycle of violence is unjustifiable and must come to an end. In democratic societies, the use of force is a monologue, not a dialogue. It is therefore my generation's duty to leave behind it a region without conflicts and in sustainable peace, a functional Balkans in which Kosovo and Serbia, as two independent nations, aspire to a European future. I know all too well that for leaders, building peace is much more challenging — more dangerous, even — than going to war, but we have an obligation to maintain peace for our children and the generations to come. We owe them a future without conflict. Kosovo is ready. We are ready for dialogue. We are ready to take tough decisions, but decisions from which both Kosovo and Serbia will emerge as winners. However, we are also aware that if we do not seize this historic moment, all the parties involved will suffer the consequences.

Two decades ago, on a mundane day much like this one, I was in uniform, fighting the regime of Slobodan Milošević. I am very proud of my past and that of my fellow fighters. Today, as President of the independent State of Kosovo, I am aware that I have another big challenge before me, which is the battle for our future, for peace, the battle to end the century-old conflict between our two peoples. I know that it will not be at all easy. I know that it will require compromises and that agreements of this kind are not very popular. However, they are necessary. I firmly believe that an agreement like this has the power to transform our entire region and can shift the priorities of our people. It would mean that no one could win votes founded on hate and populism or be able to stoke people's fears. A comprehensive agreement would open the door to new leadership, whose primary aim would be reform and development. I truly believe in a future where Kosovo and Serbia will sit as equals at the table of the European family. I believe in a future where Kosovo and Serbia's soldiers will serve alongside one another in peacekeeping missions around the world. I believe in that future because I have seen the unimaginable unfold before my eyes.

I am inspired every day by Kosovan athletes who teach us that a comeback is possible after defeat and that our flag can be flown even in countries that have not yet recognized our country. I am inspired by the journalists who criticize me daily but who also make me a better President every day. I am inspired by the citizens of Kosovo who, despite all the pain, suffering and loss that they have endured, never gave up on the values and principles that still stand — liberty, equality, justice and dignity. I believe in a European future for Kosovo and our region, a future without intrigue, conflict or hatred. It is up to us to bring about that future, in the coming weeks and months, through a peaceful, final, legally binding agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, without borders along ethnic lines or exchanges of peoples, but rather through their reciprocal recognition of each other as independent and sovereign countries with multi-ethnic societies.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Thaçi for his statement.

I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would first like to thank our colleagues from Côte d'Ivoire for their principled position and for convening an urgent meeting of the Security Council at the request of Serbia and Russia in connection with the gross violation of resolution 1244 (1999), as a result of

the Pristina Assembly's adoption of a package of laws on the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into fully fledged armed forces.

We are grateful to the Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing and assessments. We also listened carefully to Mr. Hashim Thaçi's statement. We welcome the participation in today's meeting of the President of Serbia, His Excellency Mr. Alexander Vučić, and we share his serious concerns about the situation in Kosovo and the illegitimacy surrounding the decision to establish the so-called Kosovo armed forces. We are referring not only to the illegitimacy relating to the decision itself, but also with regard to the assessments of it, such as we have already heard in the references to the statement of the European Union (EU) eight, and which I think we will hear about more than once at this meeting, from those for whom international law no longer exists. They are now acting on the basis of a so-called rules-based order into which they fit any illegitimate decisions, adapting them to suit political expediency. Today we will hear painstaking explanations of why resolution 1244 (1999) has nothing to do with the so-called sovereign decision by the Parliament of a so-called sovereign State.

As the years have gone by, we have often warned that rather than being resolved, the problems in Kosovo, alas, are accumulating. We have constantly pointed out that the situation in the region is extremely unstable and could spin out of control at any moment. We have demanded intensive international monitoring based on the Security Council's direction. Our calls have been ignored. They have regularly covered up for Pristina, and as a result, the situation has taken an explosive turn. Pristina's provocative, five-year refusal to fulfil a key agreement with Belgrade on the creation of a community of Serbian municipalities of Kosovo has been compounded by other gross violations. The decision to transform the Kosovo Security Force into the Kosovo armed forces is a blatant violation of resolution 1244 (1999), which, as the Secretary-General has again underscored, remains the fundamental international legal basis for the Kosovo peace settlement. The resolution includes a totally clear requirement that all Kosovo Albanian armed groups must be demilitarized. The only presence on Kosovo's territory that it authorizes is that of exclusively multinational contingents under international control.

No progress is being made in Kosovo on creating conditions conducive to a political settlement. The EU mediation mission is getting no practical results. Unlawful incidents and violent raids by the Kosovo police special forces on the Serbian population in the north have become more frequent. Ensuring reliable protection for Orthodox buildings in Kosovo is a major problem, and the takeover of Serbian Orthodox Church property by Kosovars continues. The region is still an attractive area for recruiting radicals, and terrorists from Syria and Iraq have been fleeing there. Refugees and internally displaced persons are still returning to the region at unsatisfactorily low levels. A genuine humanitarian crisis threatened when Pristina introduced punishing customs duties on goods from central Serbia. Against that backdrop, the emergence of the Kosovo Armed Forces represents a threat to peace and security in the region through a relapse into armed conflict.

Resolution 1244 (1999) is being flouted knowingly and with the support of leading Western countries as well as through their direct connivance, including through the Kosovo Force (KFOR), whose international security presence in the region is based on that same resolution. We have been compelled to conclude that the Kosovo Force takes an exceedingly selective approach to implementing its mandate. Only a few days ago, on the pretext of ensuring security in the Serb-populated northern regions of Kosovo, KFOR conducted large-scale exercises there using dozens of armoured vehicles. What it looked like was another episode of the intimidation of Kosovo Serbs, while there have been no such exercises in Albanian areas even in cases of overt provocations and violence, such as on 7 and 8 September, when Albanian radicals blocked roads with barriers in order to prevent Serbia's President Vučić from visiting Serbs in a village in the area. KFOR failed to respond adequately to that clear violation of freedom of movement, not to mention the fact that it involved a high-level official.

Under KFOR there has been a long-standing policy of providing systematic training for Albanian personnel in the Kosovo Security Force that exceeds KFOR's remit. We are not talking about dealing with problems in the areas of rescue or civil defence but about training and instruction of a purely military nature. This goes on at Camp Bondsteel, among other places, which was originally established for peacebuilding purposes as part of the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999). Its operations are totally untransparent. We insist that KFOR present the Council with a comprehensive

and complete report on how Camp Bondsteel is being used, as well as on the personnel deployed there and its material and technical resources.

The European Union's position is extremely disappointing, in that on the one hand, it claims that it is an objective mediator, and on the other, it pretends to ignore the unlawful creation of a Kosovan army. The EU's response to Pristina's latest decision can only be called toothless. Its irresponsible, two-faced policy has crossed a dangerous line. The emergence of a so-called Kosovo army is an existential danger to Serbs. And we can see why. Suffice it to say that the ranks of the Kosovo Security Force include more than a few former militants from the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity during the conflict, whose victims were Serbs, minorities and dissenting Albanians. Those who committed crimes that included kidnapping people and removing their organs in order to sell them on the black market are still avoiding accountability. It is increasingly difficult to take seriously the promises we keep hearing year after year that the Kosovo Specialist Chambers for prosecuting the KLA's crimes will supposedly ensure the triumph of justice.

What is particularly worrying is the possibility that armed Kosovo-Albanian units could invade Serb-populated areas in the north in order to enforce Pristina's control over the entire territory of Kosovo. Such a scenario could lead to bloodshed and become a real disaster that could send the Balkans back into a period of turmoil and kill the efforts to stabilize the region that the international community has made in recent decades. Unfortunately, we have no confidence in the international security presence's ability and preparedness to prevent such a blitzkrieg.

We have taken note of the continuing highly responsible and restrained response on the part of the Serbian leadership in urging Kosovo Serbs to remain calm and not react to provocations, as well as its efforts to reduce tensions solely by diplomatic means. However, we also believe it is essential to take extremely seriously the Serbian leadership's message that if the Kosovo-Albanian security forces invade the north or attempt pogroms against Serbs in other parts of Kosovo, Belgrade will protect them. In our view, the international security presence bears the chief responsibility for providing that protection.

In addition, in accordance with paragraph 9 (b) of resolution 1244 (1999), the Kosovo Force is obliged to take immediate and thorough measures to demilitarize and disband any armed Kosovo-Albanian units. As for the decision on creating the so-called Kosovo Armed Forces in violation of the resolution, it should be immediately rescinded. We hope that within the framework of its mandate, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) will continue to play an active role in ensuring the conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all of Kosovo's residents, protecting and promoting human rights and facilitating the political process. We also hope that the European Union will use its capabilities, including its presence in Kosovo and the mechanisms of its Stabilization and Association Agreement with Pristina, to prevent the situation from deteriorating further, and will help to enable the revocation of the Kosovo-Albanian authorities' provocative decisions on trade tariffs and armed forces.

In conclusion, we should point to the counterproductive attempts by Pristina's patrons to conceal the deteriorating situation in Kosovo from the international community and create obstacles to the regular consideration of the Kosovo problem in the Security Council. And that kind of policy is one of the reasons for the current crisis situation there, because it gives the Kosovo authorities a feeling that anything is permitted and no one is accountable. The Council must continue to be focused on the situation in Kosovo. The quarterly cycle for the Secretary-General's reports on UNMIK's activity should be strictly observed. We cannot exclude the possibility that if the adverse trends escalate it could be necessary to convene new emergency meetings of the Security Council. God forbid that should be the case, needless to say.

We would like to draw the Secretariat's attention to the importance of carefully monitoring the developing situation and reporting on it to the Security Council.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I would first like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jean Pierre Lacroix for his briefing and welcome President Vučić of the Republic of Serbia and President Thaçi of the Republic of Kosovo to the Council. I will focus on three points — first, the sovereignty of Kosovo; secondly, the background to the current tensions; and thirdly, the need for a resumption of the European Union (EU)-facilitated dialogue.

On my first point, I want to emphasize that the Kingdom of the Netherlands fully supports the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Kosovo. As a sovereign State, Kosovo has the right to create its own institutions. That said, we believe that the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force should be a transparent and inclusive process, in line with Kosovo's Constitution. The Netherlands encourages Kosovo to work on the transformation in consultation with NATO and other relevant international actors. The inclusivity of the process is important to ensuring that the 10-year transition has the support of all in Kosovo and especially its non-majority communities. More broadly, Kosovo's path towards further normalization should be an orderly process in which the Council's resolutions and decisions should be respected and fully implemented by all players on the ground.

That brings me to my second point, the background to the current tensions. The decision by the Kosovo authorities to start the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force comes at a sensitive moment. We have recently seen both sides take a series of steps that have not been conducive to a climate furthering the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Almost two decades after the adoption of resolution 1244 (1999), Belgrade and Pristina have made significant progress in reaching agreement on important issues. Yet they still have to agree on many aspects of their future relationship. Understandably, the process is not easy and has its ups and downs. It is also the reason why we still have to spend time in the Council discussing the situation in Kosovo, even if it no longer constitutes an imminent or grave threat to international peace and security. We call on both countries to act responsibly and to work to calm the situation.

That brings me to my third point. It is essential that both sides resume the EU-facilitated dialogue as soon as possible, without preconditions, and implement the agreements made in the past. They should realize that the status quo is not a long-term solution. Security depends on good-neighbourly relations. Everyone in the region stands to gain from political normalization, more economic integration and fewer trade barriers.

It is key for Kosovo to improve the daily lives of all its citizens. The implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union, as well as of the European reform agenda, is crucial to achieving that lofty goal. Both parties should avoid unilateral actions that go against the spirit of dialogue and undermine mutual trust. We therefore regret the fact that some members of the Council insisted on having a public debate today rather than an interactive dialogue.

In conclusion, we ask Serbia and Kosovo to demonstrate their political will and commitment to normalization by continuing to work in the framework of the EU-facilitated dialogue.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his very informative presentation, and I especially want to welcome President Vučić and President Thaçi to our meeting.

This meeting comes in the wake of recent decisions by Kosovo's Parliament on the evolution of the Kosovo Security Force over the next 10 years. In the light of the issues that Mr. Lacroix has just outlined for us, France has taken note of those decisions but, as the Secretary-General has done, wishes to express its concern about the possibility that the situation could deteriorate. We deplore the fact that since the beginning of the year, and particularly in the past few weeks, several incidents and unilateral decisions have affected the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. I am referring specifically to the Kosovo Government's decision to impose a 100 per cent tax on products from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, like the European Union, we call on the Kosovo authorities to rescind. More generally, and like the Secretary-General, we ask both sides to exercise the greatest possible restraint and urge them to do all they can to resolve their disputes through dialogue in order to limit the risk of escalation.

Two principles must guide our views on this subject — respect for Kosovo's sovereignty, which is the basis for the decision to initiate the transition of the Kosovo Security Force, and strict respect for the remit of the Kosovo Force (KFOR), as established by resolution 1244 (1999). While it seems legitimate to us that Kosovo, which we recognize as a State, should be able to acquire an armed force, this is not a good time to enact such laws, because it is likely to damage the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina at a moment when it is more necessary than ever. We also deplore the fact that the laws were not enacted in concert with NATO and did not go through the constitutional process. Finally, we hope that the Kosovo Security Force's deployment to the north of the country follows the current arrangements, which stipulate that such

deployment can take place only with the prior agreement of KFOR.

The implications for the stability of the region of a comprehensive and definitive settlement of the dispute between Serbia and Kosovo are huge. The goal of advancing towards a comprehensive and legally binding agreement normalizing their relations, endorsed by both sides at the highest level, must remain an absolute priority. It is therefore crucial to sustain and promote efforts to that end and ensure a sustainable environment that fosters progress in that direction. In that regard, we encourage the leaders of both countries to resume the demanding path of dialogue as soon as possible and to demonstrate the essential spirit of responsibility and political will. Each party must refrain from any action, statement or measure likely to exacerbate tensions and undermine the spirit of normalization.

Beyond the urgent need for regional stabilization and reconciliation for current generations, everyone must look decisively to the future with a view to overcoming the difficulties of today. High Representative Federica Mogherini, whose mediation efforts France supports, reminded both parties of that on 8 November. Our authorities at the highest level fully support the efforts to make progress in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. Only by fully normalizing their relations will they be able to realize their European prospects, and that is the shared compass that should guide and unite them. That is where their future lies, and it is a shared future.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing. I also listened very carefully to what President Vučić and President Thaçi said today.

We believe that Kosovo's development of its own armed forces is within its sovereign right as a self-governing independent State, and we urge Kosovo to do it — and on this I agree with the French representative — in close consultation with NATO and the wider international community. I note from Kosovo's announcement that this development is to take place over the course of 10 years.

Since resolution 1244 (1999) was adopted, Kosovo has become an independent, self-governing State recognized by more than 100 members of the United Nations, and its decision to extend the mandate of the Kosovo Security Force should be viewed in that context. The United Kingdom's interpretation of resolution 1244 (1999) is that it does not — I repeat, it does not — contain anything that precludes the future transition of the mandate of the Kosovo Security Force. In fact, I reread it at lunch time. I then went on to read the document that followed it, the constitutional framework and the United Nations Ahtisaari plan, the so-called Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement. I can assure the Council than nothing in any of those three documents precludes the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force. The constitutional framework set up a Kosovo Protection Force. The Constitution builds on that proposal and this recent decision builds on the Constitution. I just wanted to establish that. That said, we continue to urge Kosovo to act responsibly, transparently and in consultation with NATO allies, and to uphold its existing commitments to arrangements with the Kosovo Force. What President Thaçi said about his assurances today in that respect is welcome, but needless to say we expect to see it put into action.

I have noted the claim that the transition of the Kosovo Security Force represents a threat to the Kosovo-Serb community. That claim is not borne out by Kosovo's genuine efforts to make the Force a multi-ethnic force, as NATO allies have requested, and we regret that those efforts have been undermined by external pressure. We encourage the Kosovo Government to continue its outreach to the Kovoso-Serb community in order to allay anxieties. It has been a long time since the Council visited Kosovo, but I was on one of the earlier trips, during which we visited the Kosovo-Serb community in the north, where we heard from many people — but not all of them — who supported the account given by President Vučić and the Russian Ambassador today. Nor do we share Belgrade's perception that the Kosovo Security Force's expansion in size and mandate over the next decade risks jeopardizing regional stability. We look to Belgrade to respond in a measured way, including in public statements.

In the light of that, the United Kingdom considers the assertions by senior politicians and officials about the possible use of force by Serbia unhelpful, and we reject the idea that even the notion of such use of force might be floated. I think it is irresponsible that one member of the Council has repeated them today. I agree with that member that there is a risk of a return to turmoil, but it is not caused by that decision. It is caused by those outside Kosovo who would seek to exploit it for their own ends. However, I take encouragement

from hearing about Russian support for NATO today, which I think may be a first in this Chamber.

As other speakers have noted, the fundamental reason that we are here and that those problems persist is because of the lack of normalization. At every step, settlements and progress have been blocked. The United Nations, the European Union (EU), the United States and Russia have tried and, unfortunately, at every stage of trying to settle the issue, there has been a blockage, which I am sorry to say has come from Belgrade. The only way forward is through normalization, and we look to both Kosovo and Serbia to make progress in that way. We note with optimism the resolution that the Assembly of Kosovo adopted on 15 December establishing a cross-party negotiating team. I join my French colleague and others in urging both sides to return to negotiations through the EU-facilitated dialogue. Progress on the dialogue is vital to stability, security and prosperity in the two countries in the region. The final agreement itself must also contribute to local, regional and global stability. The two sides have to keep in mind that any proposals they put forward through the negotiations must enhance the safety and security of all — I repeat, all — their citizens.

Obviously, I do not find it surprising, since I took part in it, that a statement was delivered today on behalf of the EU-8, the five EU members of the Security Council — France, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom — along with Italy, Belgium and Germany. But the reason it is not surprising is because it is our region. We still care very deeply about what happens in the Western Balkans. While EU countries and the EU itself have put a great deal of effort into helping stability and security there, it is their future — the future of Kosovo and Serbia. As other speakers have done today, I urge them to take all the steps necessary to normalize their relations through the EU-facilitated dialogue. I call on all their leaders, who have been elected to represent their people's interests, to enable that to happen. Both countries must now focus on a sustainable normalization agreement through the dialogue, an agreement that enhances security, enjoys popular domestic support and benefits both countries. We stand ready, as we have always done, to support such an agreement.

Mr. Hunter (United States of America): I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations for his briefing today and welcome President Vučić and President Thaçi to the Council. We thank them for their remarks and for joining us here today.

The United States reaffirms its support for a gradual, transparent transition to a professional, multi-ethic NATO interoperable force that serves and reflects all of Kosovo's communities. The legislation passed by Kosovo's Assembly last week is fully in line with resolution 1244 (1999). It is Kosovo's sovereign right to establish and maintain an armed force. Resolution 1244 (1999) authorized the establishment of an international security presence in Kosovo and charged it with demilitarizing the Kosovo Liberation Army and other armed Kosovo-Albanian groups. Those provisions do not apply to the Kosovo Security Force. The Force is neither the Kosovo Liberation Army nor an armed Kosovo-Albanian group. It is a separate, multi-ethnic force that was established following Kosovo's 2008 independence, and which the International Court of Justice clearly ruled in 2010 does not violate international law or resolution 1244 (1999).

The vote on Kosovo on 14 December brings no immediate change to the structure, mission or operations of the Force. Rather, it was a first step, representing the beginning of the practical, ongoing work of building a multi-ethnic force, in accordance with the Government of Kosovo's 10-year transition plan. We call on the Government of Kosovo to continue its close coordination with NATO allies and partners in engaging in outreach to its minority communities now and throughout the years-long process ahead. We expect the Government of Kosovo to adhere reliably to all existing arrangements and commitments regarding troop movements and the operation of forces in Kosovo, particularly its 2013 commitment to the NATO Secretary General that any operations in northern Kosovo require consultation with the Commander of the Kosovo Force. Ultimately, however, Kosovo's security is best served by normalizing relations with Serbia. Dialogue should be both countries' overarching priority, and we urge both to remove any barriers and not to take provocative actions that prevent a return to the negotiating table and reaching a comprehensive normalization agreement.

We encourage both Kosovo and Serbia to take immediate steps to lower tensions and create the conditions for rapid progress on the normalization dialogue. We urge them to recognize the value of fully committing to normalization, which will bring great benefits to the people, the economies and the peace and security of both countries. Mutual recognition and

normalized relations between Serbia and Kosovo are the future, and all sides will benefit from recognizing and embracing that reality.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): My delegation welcomes His Excellency President Aleksandar Vučić and Mr. Hashim Thaçi to the Chamber and thanks Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for providing us with an overview of recent developments.

We would like to remind the Council that one month ago in this very Chamber (see S/PV.8399), we expressed our concern about the possible transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into armed forces. Now we are hearing about the recent decision to adopt three laws initiating such a transition. We share the Secretary-General's position on the matter and his call to all the parties concerned to exercise restraint and refrain from actions that could lead to further setbacks in the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. That reflects the current state of affairs in the region, which requires our continued attention as a matter of relevance in the agenda. Our priorities in that direction should be the continued promotion of dialogue between the parties, as well as confidence-building measures in the political-military, socioeconomic and human dimensions, in compliance with resolution 1244 (1999) and subsequent documents.

Kazakhstan also supports the calls of the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Mogherini, addressed to Pristina to remove taxes on products imported from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as they go against the spirit of regional cooperation and hinders the dialogue process. Such a dialogue should be carried out under the auspices of the European Union, with the involvement of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other relevant regional and subregional organizations, to maintain comprehensive and sustainable security and development in Kosovo.

In that vein, we consider it important that the parties adhere to the agreements previously reached through the mediation of international organizations. We believe in the importance of ensuring peace and security in the region. An international security presence will contribute to the establishment of a whole-communities safe environment, and we agree with the Secretary-General on that. We stand for action within the existing international negotiating mechanisms.

Once again, we express our regret that the region decided to go ahead with the formation of an army. To that end, it is highly important to underline that any unilateral steps outside of the existing international negotiating mechanisms could raise tensions, constitute a serious threat to peace and jeopardize overall stability in the region. Kazakhstan urges all interested parties to continue implementing their commitments in a good spirit of mutual respect, understanding and compromise for the sake of long-lasting peace and stability in that part of the world.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, I would like to welcome the presence of the President of Serbia, Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, who is in attendance and has spoken at this meeting. I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, for his briefing. I also carefully listened to the statement by Mr. Hashim Thaçi.

China has been closely following the Kosovo issue and has noted the complex dynamics at play in Kosovo's current security situation. Resolution 1244 (1999) is an important legal basis for settling the Kosovo issue. It is China's consistent position that the parties reaching a mutually acceptable solution through dialogue within the framework of the relevant Council resolutions is the best approach to a solution to the Kosovo issue. The parties concerned should refrain from any rhetoric or action that could complicate or escalate the situation and should create enabling conditions for a lasting solution to the Kosovo issue.

China respects Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, understands Serbia's legitimate concerns about the Kosovo issue and commends Serbia's efforts to find a political solution to the matter. China hopes that the parties concerned will continue their pragmatic, constructive dialogue, remain firmly committed to a political solution, implement the agreements reached, gradually enhance mutual trust, meet each other halfway and continue to build consensus with an eye to a lasting solution that is acceptable to all parties.

Tolerance, reconciliation and harmonious coexistence among all ethnic groups in Kosovo are in line with the fundamental interests and development needs of all the populations. We hope all the parties concerned will put the well-being of the people first, protect the legitimate rights and interests of all ethnic groups, promote their economic and social development

and jointly safeguard peace, stability and prosperity in the Balkans.

The Security Council should remain seized of the Kosovo issue and encourage the parties concerned to engage in genuine dialogue in good faith so we can continue to play a constructive role in the search for a proper solution to the Kosovo issue.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, for his briefing to the Security Council. I would like to recognize and express my appreciation for the presence of Presidents Thaçi and Vučić, who are in the Chamber today.

As we see it, the main threats to stability in the Western Balkans are the pending issues related to the status of Kosovo. They are holding back the European Union (EU) integration process, which in turn is the main driver of stability in the region, both for Serbia and for Kosovo. The focus of the international community must be on insisting that the parties reach a comprehensive and legally binding agreement that contributes to regional stability. The international community should also focus on offering support to that process.

With regard to the recent legislation passed by the Kosovo Assembly on the Kosovo Security Force, in principle that is a matter for the sovereign State of Kosovo. At the same time, we — as do others — strongly encourage Pristina to ensure that the transformation of its security force over the next 10 years takes place through a transparent and inclusive process, in line with the Constitution and in close coordination with NATO and its partners. It is important that all communities be associated with that exercise, so as to ensure that the transition eventually receives overall support in Kosovo.

Over the past weeks and months, the steps taken by both sides have not contributed to good-neighbourly relations and a climate conducive to the normalization of relations. It is important that all sides refrain from actions and statements that might increase tensions. We call on both parties to adhere to regional agreements, including free trade agreements.

We have recently seen a renewed commitment from both Belgrade and Pristina to engage in the normalization dialogue facilitated by the European Union. The dialogue must continue without preconditions. It is the only path to a sustainable political and inclusive solution for the region. In that regard, we welcome the recent resolution of the Kosovo Parliament establishing a cross-party team for the dialogue, with the aim of creating a unified platform. We underline the need for the full and effective participation of women in the dialogue, as well as consultations with civil society, including women's organizations.

The future of both Serbia and Kosovo lies within the European Union. Our message to the two Presidents present here is that both Pristina and Belgrade need to implement commitments and pursue the dialogue process with constructive engagement and dedication. Now is the time to show courageous and visionary leadership. If they put the choice of confrontation or cooperation to their people, I am sure that the people will support the latter, as they understand that cooperation is what is needed to bring about peace and prosperity in the region.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to express our thanks for the convening of this meeting and for the briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix. We would also like to welcome the presence of the President of Serbia, Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, and the President of Kosovo, Mr. Hashim Thaçi.

Peru supports the peacebuilding process in Kosovo, the normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrade and stability in the Balkan subregion. To that end, we consider it paramount that all parties remain committed to the fulfilment and implementation of resolution 1244 (1999) and the Brussels agreements, and that the Council remain united and attentive in the exercise of its role as guarantor.

Last month, when the Council was considering the legislative initiative concerning the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into a regular army (see S/PV.8399), we expressed the need for careful evaluation. We underline the need to take into account the presence and role of the Kosovo Force, as well as the impact of the measure on the political dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. In the same vein, we agree with the Secretary-General that the three laws adopted by the Kosovar Parliament are not in conformity with resolution 1244 (1999) and the Brussels agreements, which, as we recall, provided for the establishment of an international security force led by NATO and of the Kosovo Police Force, respectively. Peru calls on all

parties to exercise restraint with a view to promoting détente and constructive dialogue, in accordance with applicable international law and the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Let me begin by thanking His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, for his presence at the Security Council today. I also welcome His Excellency Mr. Hashim Thaçi, President of the Republic of Kosovo. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing. I will now make the following statement with regard to the issue at hand.

We recognize that the transition of the Kosovo Security Force is in principle a matter for Kosovo to decide. However, we stress that it is of the utmost importance that the future armed forces of Kosovo be formed through an inclusive and gradual process, while respecting the relevant provisions of the Constitution. Then and only then can they serve the security interests of all communities.

In our assessment, recent developments do not in and of themselves constitute a threat to international peace. We trust that all political actors in the region will act responsibly and refrain from any statements or actions that may lead to escalation. We welcome the restraint shown thus far.

We also reiterate our conviction that lasting stability in the region can be achieved only through continued dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina under the auspices of the European Union, which should lead to a legally binding agreement on the comprehensive normalization of relations.

Mr. Amde (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing on the latest developments in Kosovo. I also welcome the presence of the President of Serbia, His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, at today's meeting, and thank him for his remarks. I also thank Mr. Hashim Thaçi for his statement.

Our position on the issue of Kosovo has always been consistent and clear. We would like to reaffirm our support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia and for the peaceful and amicable resolution of all outstanding issues between Belgrade and Pristina, in accordance with the Brussels Agreement. We expressed our views on this issue at the briefing we had last month (see S/PV.8399).

With regard to the latest developments, we take note of the statement issued by the Secretary-General expressing concern about the adoption by the Assembly of Kosovo of three draft laws aimed at strengthening the role and capacity of the Kosovo Security Force (SG/SM/19408). As the Secretary-General rightly underscored, resolution 1244 (1999) provides the sole legal framework for the international security presence, the Kosovo Force, which was entrusted with the responsibility to ensure a safe and secure environment in Kosovo. Therefore, any action taken that is contrary to what is stipulated in resolution 1244 (1999) would not help but to undermine efforts aimed at finding a solution to the Kosovo issue through dialogue. That is why we echo the call made by the Secretary-General to the parties to exercise restraint and refrain from actions that could raise tensions and cause further setbacks in the European Union-facilitated dialogue for the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

Ethiopia fully supports the work that the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo has been undertaking in discharging its mandates in line with resolution 1244 (1999). We also recognize the significant role of the European Union on matters concerning Kosovo.

In conclusion, the security and stability of Kosovo and the region will ultimately be ensured when there is political will and resolve on the part of both sides. In that respect, we once again encourage both parties to remain committed to dialogue and negotiation with the view to finding a mutually acceptable solution.

Mr. Edjang Nnaga (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to express our delegation's welcome to His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia, and Mr. Hashim Thaçi, who honour the Security Council with their presence at this important briefing on Kosovo. We also thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his detailed briefing on recent developments.

As we have made clear in all of our statements in this Chamber, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea always advocates recourse to dialogue, consultation and negotiation to settle disputes and conflicts. In line with that position, the delegation of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea regrets the problems that have arisen between Kosovo and Serbia, and we call on the parties

to remain calm and refrain from making statements or doing anything that might lead to an escalation and undermine stability and security, not only locally but in the Balkans in general.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea reaffirms its respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia, and we are grateful for its continued efforts aimed at finding a political, inclusive and peaceful solution to the question of Kosovo. We also encourage Pristina to refrain from actions that could stifle regional cooperation, increase tensions and damage the trust generated between the different communities, thereby jeopardizing the entire effort of the international community to find a peaceful solution to the crisis in Kosovo.

We also encourage the parties to intensify their efforts aimed at improving regional cooperation, safeguarding good relations of trust among communities and respecting the implementation of agreements reached and the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999). Furthermore, we urge the countries that support the parties to the conflict to do everything possible to ensure that Belgrade and Pristina return to the negotiating table as the only way to find a lasting solution to the dispute between them.

Finally, we appreciate the work of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and the support it provides to Kosovo's communities, as well as regional and international actors and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, with a view to fulfilling the mandate of resolution 1244 (1999).

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia thanks the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, for his briefing. We also thank the President of Serbia, Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, for his remarks, and Mr. Hashim Thaçi for his statement.

Bolivia calls for the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999), including respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Republic of Serbia. The resolution remains in full force, for which supervision by the international community is necessary. That resolution provides the only legal framework for the international security presence, which in this case is fulfilled by the Kosovo Force, responsible for ensuring a safe environment in the province. Any obstacle preventing the Kosovo Force from fulfilling its responsibilities would be inconsistent with the resolution I have just mentioned.

In that context, the adoption of three draft laws by the Assembly of Kosovo aimed at strengthening the role and the capacity of the Kosovo Security Force is cause for alarm. We reiterate that any attempt to transform the Kosovo Security Force into an armed force would run counter to resolution 1244 (1999) and international law. We call on the Kosovo authorities to refrain from that action.

We urge all interested parties to act with restraint and to refrain from undertaking such actions, which could increase tensions and lead to a new setback in the dialogue facilitated by the European Union for the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Furthermore, we also view with concern the increase in import tariffs by Kosovo against Serbia, which can be seen as another provocation that undermines that dialogue.

We believe that it is important that the parties comply with the commitments made in that context. Along those lines, we take note of the efforts of the European Union and the mediation of its High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in order to make progress in implementing the existing agreements.

Finally, we urge the parties to work towards a peaceful solution through dialogue through a firm commitment, based on confidence-building measures, to using good offices to ease tensions and peaceful means to seek consensus-based solutions, in line with the obligation to negotiate, as stipulated by international law. Such means should make it possible to preserve peace, while promoting political dialogue and respect for human rights, taking into account the well-being of the region and its population.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and His Excellency Mr. Hashim Thaçi, President of the Republic of Kosovo, at today's meeting. I would also like to thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his valuable briefing.

The State of Kuwait acknowledges the sensitivity of the measure taken by the Assembly of Kosovo. We reaffirm that every State has the full, sovereign and inherent right to establish its national institutions in

line with its national Constitution and legislation. We recognize that the decisions recently taken by the Kosovo Parliament could be a source of concern to the friendly Republic of Serbia, given the recent developments in the relationship between the two States.

We hope that such developments do not undermine the political process under the auspices of the European Union. We believe that the decision of the Republic of Kosovo does not contravene resolution 1244 (1999). We thank the President of Kosovo for the reassurances that he provided in the Chamber earlier, in which he stated that the measure does not constitute any threat to the minorities in Kosovo or the neighbouring States.

We call on both sides to exercise self-restraint and to take all necessary measures to calm the situation and to decrease tension. We urge them to continue to deal with issues of concern through dialogue and to demonstrate the necessary political will in order to ensure the full normalization of relations between the two sides.

Kuwait affirms that the high-level European Union-facilitated dialogue in Brussels between Belgrade and Pristina remains the most appropriate framework for settling all outstanding issues between the two sides. It is the appropriate means for reaching lasting, just and consensual solutions.

We would like to reiterate our full support to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. We highly value the vital role that the United Nations has played in helping Kosovo to build its institutions and to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 1244 (1999). We call on both sides to fully implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. We also welcome the statement by the Secretary-General in that regard.

In conclusion, it is important that the international community continues to make efforts in order to urge Pristina and Belgrade to overcome their differences and reach consensual, fair and sustainable solutions that are acceptable to both sides and lead to peace, security and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

My delegation welcomes the presence of His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, at this briefing on the recent developments in the situation in Kosovo. We also welcome the presence of President Hashim Thaçi. We also thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his briefing.

The vote on 14 December on three draft laws aimed at transforming the Kosovo Security Force into a national army has provoked a response from the international community. However, that initiative, which falls within the sovereign right of Kosovo, could have implications for the mandate of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and the Kosovo Force. In fact, the implementation of those laws could be incompatible with the provisions of resolution 1244 (1999), which is the only legal framework for the presence of those international forces in Kosovo.

That decision takes place in the context of a stalemate in the negotiations led by Mrs. Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, with a view to normalizing relations between Serbia and Kosovo.

My country therefore calls on all parties to exercise restraint and to avoid unilateral acts that could exacerbate the already visible tensions in the region. We urge them to swiftly return to the negotiating table in order to ease the tensions resulting from the recent initiatives and to create conditions conducive to resolving all disputed issues between the two parties. In the light of its experience, Côte d'Ivoire is convinced that the pursuit of peace through dialogue is the only viable way to restore lasting stability and good-neighbourly relations in the Balkans.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire calls on all stakeholders to engage in the European Union-facilitated negotiations in good faith and without conditions in order to give peace a chance.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

Mr. Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, has asked for the floor to make a further statement

Mr. Vučić (Serbia): Once again, I am very thankful to all participants and profoundly grateful to all those who wanted at least to listen to us. I think that it was very obvious that no one could refer to a single provision, article or paragraph from which Pristina

derives its right to form its armed forces. Some people said that that was not banned by resolution 1244 (1999) but no one cited a single regulation, rule or article from which Pristina derived its right to create its own army. There is a very simple reason for that, since that article or regulation does not exist. At the same time, I am very grateful to the many people who, regardless of their political attitude towards the Kosovo issue, wanted to be objective and to analyse the reality.

I want to refer to just a few arguments used by Pristina and some of the Ambassadors in the Chamber. The representative of Pristina said that terrible ethnic cleansing was committed by the Serb forces. Here are the facts.

There used to be 1.4 million Albanians in the southern Serbian province. Today there are 1.7 million Albanian people in Kosovo, where there used to be 220,000 Serbs. There are still between 105,000 and 106,000 Serbs living in Kosovo. Those are the numbers. Those are the facts. Who committed ethnic cleansing? Is there anyone who can deny those numbers? I am not saying that we have always been absolutely right in everything. Not at all. I have to say, however, that that kind of biased approach is not only killing the truth, but it is also killing real chances for reaching a compromise between the two sides.

At the same time, I heard something that I could not understand. At least the two representatives of Pristina and — I believe — the United Kingdom referred to the Ahtisaari plan. What is that plan about? When was that plan adopted, by whom, in which organization, by which factions and by which parties? When they do not have sufficient arguments, as they do not have enough facts on their side, they then refer to something that does not exist. It has never been put in force. Are we or are we not speaking the truth? There are no real provisions, articles, arrangements or agreements to which they can refer. Someone here mentioned the use of force. It was the Ambassador of the United Kingdom. I never mentioned that, and we did not use any kind of force, unlike the other side. It used force against the chief negotiator — beating him up and trying to humiliate him — merely because he was speaking loudly about the Kosovo problem. He carried out his notifications in accordance with all our arrangements with Pristina.

It seems to me that it is much easier for some countries to blame Serbia for everything. It does not matter whether or not we did something. We did not impose taxes against them. We did not create any kind of army in the north or within the Serb community. That does not exist. We did not do anything, but we have to be blamed because someone has to justify his own wrong politics. And speaking about INTERPOL, the representative of Pristina said here that only organized crime benefited from INTERPOL's wrong decision. No, I want Pristina to do much better with regard to organized crime issues, but today that is the worst place in Europe with regard to such an important issue.

Concerning the support of the Serb community and the so-called Kosovo armed forces, they were coming in tears complaining that we in Serbia were exerting great pressure on them. All 10 mayors — all of them — from all 10 Serb-inhabited municipalities in Kosovo referred to Mr. Thaçi's statement and said that he was not telling the truth and that they are absolutely against the formation of the Kosovo armed forces. They see the formation of the Kosovo armed forces as a grave threat to their survival. Who knows that better than they do?

Once again, I am profoundly grateful to all those people who have shown their support for the territorial integrity of Serbia and resolution 1244 (1999). At the same time, I am also thankful to those people who — although some of them recognized the independence of Kosovo — wanted to see things in a very objective way. They have my promise that Serbia will do its best to keep the peace and maintain tranquillity and stability. As everyone knows, the Serbian people are a very proud and dignified people, and we just want to avoid all forms of humiliation targeting us, which we would not allow anyone else in the world to suffer. It does not matter how big they are or how small we are. We will resume and carry on our dialogue as soon as they rescind their irresponsible decision involving those tariffs.

I am not very optimistic. I am telling the Council that my concerns and worries are even greater today than they were yesterday. I believe that we have acted and reacted so far in a very serious and responsible way, and we will continue in the same manner. Hopefully, one day, we will be able to reach a possible arrangement with Pristina, but recently everything that they have done has been extremely irresponsible, taking us backwards five, six or seven years. We need the Council's full support and for the United Nations to play a larger role. We will strive to that end more than

ever by asking of the Council to support all processes that will lead us to a possible arrangement.

I thank everyone once again for listening to us, and, hopefully, nothing worse than what has happened over recent weeks will happen in the future.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Thaçi.

Mr. Thaçi (*spoke in Albanian; English interpretation provided by delegation*): I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to address the Security Council once again, and I thank everyone for their support and understanding.

We cannot deny the past. We know who the victim was, and we know who the aggressor was. There will be no rewriting of history. The war took place in the twentieth century, and we must accept that reality without theatricality and look forward towards the future. As unfounded accounts of how events unfolded were provided, let me state several facts before the Council.

Whether one likes it or not, the State of Serbia killed 13,500 Albanian civilians in the Kosovo conflict. Not one person has been accused. Serbia's State apparatus — its paramilitary police troops — also raped approximately 20,000 Albanian women, with no one accused let alone convicted. One million Albanians were forcibly expelled from Kosovo, where 40 per cent of the infrastructure was destroyed by Serbian State forces. President Milošević was accused but never convicted. There were 400 massacres of Albanians, but not a single person has been indicted or convicted. One hundred and sixty people were killed in the village of Izbica alone — men, women, children and the elderly. Two hundred and fifty civilians were killed in Krusha — again, men, women, children and the elderly — and 64 remain missing, with no one accused or convicted. Three hundred and sixty people — men, women, children and the elderly — were killed in the village of Meja, with no investigations, indictments or convictions. In the village of Studime, 116 were killed; again, with no one accused or convicted. The same happened in Račak, Rezala, Gornje Obrinje and all other massacre sites.

To those who talk about justice we say that fighters in Kosovo were subject to justice in a number of instances, first with the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo in parallel with the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and then with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo. Twenty years on, Kosovo wants to show the greatest level of State responsibility by believing in truth and justice. In partnership with the international community and the European Union, Kosovo has established Specialist Chambers and will cooperate with authorities in a transparent, responsible and credible manner in the process.

Let me also emphasize that, regardless of the fact that we are the victims, today in Kosovo there are more Albanians than Serbs being convicted of war crimes, while in Serbia not a single Serb has been convicted in any of the 400 massacres and instances of ethnic cleansing committed against Albanians in Kosovo. Moreover, Serbia's Office of the Prosecutor for War Crimes is no longer operating. I believe in the right and just war we conducted, just as I do not question that some fighters might have deviated from the struggle for freedom.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.